

Foreword

The present volume brings together morphosyntactic descriptions of six South(ern) African Bantu languages: Xitsonga, Tshivenda, Siswati, South Ndebele, Sepedi (Northern Sotho) and Sesotho (Southern Sotho) in terms of their morphosyntactic parameters which is the second volume in a series of such descriptions (cf. Shinagawa & Abe 2019). These descriptions have been created by an international team during a two-week workshop hosted by the JSPS-funded ReNeLDA project at the University of Venda in March 2020 and subsequent team meetings for each language team.

These descriptions make an important contribution to South African linguistics because they are internally and externally comparable, thereby lending themselves to further work on varieties or closely related languages. They are clearly and accessibly structured, which means they are usable by students and scholars in South Africa and beyond; and all data is fully glossed and the volume is available free of charge in open access.

Work on (micro)parameters has been the focus of work in much of Eastern (cf. Gibson et al. 2020, Gibson et al. to appear) and Southern Africa, but little has been done in South Africa itself and on South African languages. Despite the existence of colonial-era grammars and other reference grammars published until the 1990s, there is a lack of up-to-date and accessible linguistic work on the African languages of South Africa in general and the languages featured in this volume in particular, seeing as they are mostly less frequently spoken, and little to no comparative linguistic work is being done in South Africa. There is overall far too little descriptive work being done on most of South Africa's languages and students who may be keen to start such work lack good and accurate linguistic materials to get started and it often remains difficult to answer even simple questions. To draw on examples from Sesotho – it remains unclear if there is a general unmarked past or which form that would be, and what the various TAM markers and auxiliaries mean (cf. Riedel et al. 2019, Morolong 1978, Doke and Mofokeng 1957 which give some examples but none of which are comprehensive or exhaustive). Or how the two prefixes before Sesotho adjectives should be analysed, and if they are indeed prefixes, or if in fact there are clear adjectives. While the chapters in this volume take a position on some of these matters, more importantly they can open up conversations and instigate new research projects into these questions.

Each chapter was authored by a team including students and scholars from local and international universities, creating opportunities for building a global research network for the participants. Local postgraduate students who are home language speakers of the relevant languages were integral parts of each team, thereby receiving important training and a new understanding of what gaps exist for future studies.

Traditional grammars typically include little to no syntactic information, beyond some discussion of verbal extensions, focusing on morphology and less on phonetics; while teaching focussed materials

tend to leave them out altogether or aim for simplicity over adequate and correct linguistic descriptions. In Southern Africa glossing is rarely seen in all but the most recent journal publications or theses written at universities abroad, which means even existing and available literature is not easily accessible to the wider linguistic community, including local students and scholars who wish to start exploring African languages but either are not native speakers and/or not deeply familiar with the morphology of the relevant language. Moreover, older works such as Doke (1927) or Doke and Mofokeng (1957), use terminology and concepts that are not accessible to current students and scholars, either locally or internationally.

This publication can address some of these unfortunate gaps and be of great help to the next generation of scholars. These descriptions will be a good starting point for students looking to identify topics for a dissertation or thesis and for scholars in search of research questions or comparative data. Scholars from across Africa can also access these materials to learn more about Southern African Bantu languages.

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